



[Brian Bandell](#)

Senior Reporter- *South Florida Business Journal*

[Email](#) | [LinkedIn](#) | [Twitter](#)

Apr 29, 2013, 2:54pm EDT

Doctors learn from flyboys at American Anesthesiology



[Enlarge](#)

Dr. Jeff Shapiro, medical director of American Anesthesiology at Piedmont Atlanta Hospital.

When the doctors at American Anesthesiology were looking to improve patient care, they found help from above — as in the world of aviation.

Sunrise-based [Mednax](#) (NYSE: MD) hired LifeWings Partners to work with its American Anesthesiology practice at Piedmont Atlanta Hospital to become a high reliability organization. That's a level of quality standard often used in aviation and aerospace.

Fittingly, Collerville, Tenn.-based LifeWings' team of consultants includes former astronauts, military flight surgeons and pilots.

Dr. [Jeff Shapiro](#), medical director of that practice of American Anesthesiology, said the results are so impressive that the company plans to introduce the program at its other locations. It has 17 anesthesia practices in eight states.

"We enlisted a bunch of aviation flyboys who are now safety consultants," he said.

The culture and communication in his department has changed, Shapiro said. One key change is that the least senior person needs to feel comfortable standing up to the most senior person without fear of retribution.

"I want everyone in our department to feel empowered to stand up and say 'that's not right,'" Shapiro said. "In medicine, every mistake or error need not lead to punishment. We understand that honest mistakes happen."

They are also requiring more than a yes or no response, asking for details to make sure people understand what's required of them.

Four months after the practice started the program, a survey found that it reported more events concerning patient care, there was more feedback and errors weren't treated punitively, he said.

"As the health care dollars get tighter, the amount of money that can be saved by an increased focus on patient safety is an important topic nowadays," Shapiro said.

Brian Bandell covers banking, finance, health care and education. [Get the latest banking industry news here.](#)